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authorities Stengel repeatedly mentions. But to have carried out such a comparison, would have increased this already extended notice to a length which would have proven wearisome to the most patient reader. So we will be content with recalling such opinions of our author as seem to be novel and suggestive, and which are stated the more clearly and confidently. These include the caution against partisanship in the question of the priority of lines and forms, which has been occasioned by the greater attention which the French side has received; the unambiguous statement that it is a fixed number of syllables rather than of accents (in the English meaning of the term), which is the underlying principle of the Romance verse,—wherein we see the tendency towards set rules of prosody, and that desire for law and authority which characterizes the heirs of Rome—; the general classification of all Romance verses into verses subjected to a rising, and verses governed by a falling rhythm, and all the consequences which result from this division; the relation of verse-pause to word-accent, a most attractive chapter in this study; the archaic cesura of the verse of ten syllables, and the rule of syntax which resulted from such a division; the evolution of the strophe from responsive singing; and many other views only less ingenious and attractive. And it is to be remembered also, that Stengel's starting-point for his whole discussion is that Romance versification is throughout (saving in minor details) of popular rather than of learned origin. In this position he is more confident, and looks back farther into history for proof than any other writer on the subject has done, whose opinion he may share and whose position he so thoroughly defends.

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#### ITALIAN LITERATURE.

GIUSEPPE CASTELLI: *La vita e le opere di Cecco d'Ascoli*. Bologna: Zanichelli. 1892. 4<sup>to</sup>, pp. 287.

FRANCESCO degli Stabili, or Cecco d'Ascoli, as he is called, enjoyed a very wide reputation as a poet during the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries. The large number of MSS. of his 'Acerba' still preserved in the libraries of Italy and elsewhere, are ample proof of this. His fame is not due so much, perhaps, to the intrinsic merit of his poem, the 'Acerba,' which is a sort of compendium of the knowledge of the time, in the manner of Brunetto Latini's 'Tesoro,' as to the fact that he spoke disparagingly of Dante and his 'Commedia,' and that he was burned at the stake by the Inquisition. In fact Sig. Castelli (p. 171) says:

"If the memory of Cecco d'Ascoli has not entirely perished; if a part of his literary and scientific labor has been able to resist the attacks of enemies rising up from generation to generation, as though called upon by hereditary vengeance, this is due to the relation between the Ascolan and Dante, through which, even in our own days, he continues to be reviled."

Gaspary, one of the latest of Cecco's critics, says this of him:

"Fazio degli Uberti is an enthusiastic admirer of Dante; quite the contrary is another poet, who, much older than Fazio, had been in personal relations with the author of the *Commedia*, that is to say, Francesco di Simone Stabili of Ascoli, or as he is generally called, Cecco d'Ascoli. He called his poem, written about 1326, *L'Acerba*; it is a question what he intended to say by this; but it is very probable that he meant by it *l'opera acerba*, because of the difficulty of the matters contained therein. The poem, with its frequent obscurities, agrees only too well with its title. Cecco manifestly considered his *Acerba* as something superior to the *Commedia*: for directly at the beginning and frequently thereafter, whenever he finds an opportunity, he attacks Dante; denies that he has ever been in Paradise as he sings; that instead, his little faith rather lead him into Hell, and that he remained there and never again returned. In the fervor of his polemic, Cecco never even took the trouble to understand the man whom he criticised, as when he reproves him (ii., 1) for having put everything on this earth subject to Fortune, and defends, against him, the free will of the rational soul, which can overcome the influence of the stars; as if Dante had not been of the very same opinion; or, when he accuses him of never having known *il vero amore*, because in a Sonnet to Cino da Pistoia he declared it possible to change one's affection, etc."<sup>1</sup>

But whatever the world may think of Cecco d'Ascoli as a poet, it cannot well withhold its

<sup>1</sup> 'Storia della Letteratura Italiana.' (Torino, 1887), Vol. i, p. 299.

admiration for him as a man who had the courage of his convictions, and who was ready and did lay down his life in their defense. Two causes are assigned by Castelli as having perplexed the studies and investigations concerning the life and works of Cecco, and which have prevented him from assuming the place in literature which is his due.

"In the first place, perhaps in extenuation of their nefarious crime, either his accusers or his judges spread the report that beside being one of those heretics (*paterini*) destined by the church to feed with their flesh the flames of the faith, he was also the most bitter, the most ungenerous and uncompromising of the enemies of Dante: and secondly, on account of the legend which seized upon his name and made of him a famous sorcerer and magician."

It is against such criticism as Gaspary's noted above; unjust in the opinion of Castelli, that the latter attempts to defend Cecco d'Ascoli, whom he exalts among the few choicer spirits of Italy, "as a precursor of Giordano Bruno and Galileo in the struggle and in the suffering for the moral liberation of mankind"; and attempts further, "to dissipate about the figure of this mediæval Lucretius, the clouds of prejudice and calumny which have been thickened about him, not only by his persecutors and by the vulgar, but even by modern men of liberal views and lofty intellects."

But let us see who this Cecco d'Ascoli was, who, after slumbering in peace for five hundred years, is now to be roused from his obscure and lowly bed, to be rehabilitated to a place beside Dante. Francesco degli Stabili (Cecco d'Ascoli), was born of 'poor but honest parents,' according to Colocci,—*honesti parenti ma povero*,—in the latter part of October, 1269. His birthplace was Ancarano, a small town near Ascoli, whither his mother had gone to attend a religious festival. He was the son of Simone Stabili of Ascoli, and studied grammar in the latter city up to his fifteenth year, when he went to Salerno, at that time a famous university. Here he probably studied medicine and mathematics, went thence to Paris, and returning to Italy, took up his abode in Bologna. Here at the university he read Astrology, winning great fame and universal applause. This was between the years 1322 and 1325. His success at Bologna soon excited the bitter enmity of his

rivals, among whom Dino del Garbo and his son Tommaso were foremost. Through their instigations, Frate Lamberto da Cingoli, a Dominican monk, and inquisitor in the province of Lombardy, brought against him the accusation that he "ha sentenziato e discorso erroneamente di cose attinenti alla Catholica fede." Upon such a vague charge as this Cecco was condemned without delay. The sentence of Frate Lamberto was pronounced on October 16th, 1324. This sentence is so remarkable that I reproduce it here:

"Rev. P. Frater Lambertus de Cingulo Ord. Praed. Inquisitor haereticæ pravitatis Bononiae anno 1324. Die xvi decembris Magistrum Cechum filium quondam Magistri Simonis Stabilis de esculo sententiavit male et inordinate locutum fuisse de fide catholica, et propterea eidem penitenti imposuit, ut inde ad xv dies proximos suorum veram et generalem faceret peccatorem confessionem. Item quod omni die diceret xxx pater noster et totidem Ave maria. Item quod qualibet sexta feria jejunare deberet in reverentiam crucis et crucifixi hinc ad annum. Item in omni die dominica audiret sermonem in domo fratrum praedicatorum vel minorum. Item privavit ipsum omnibus libris astrologiae magnis et parvis, quos deponeret apud magistrum Albertum bononiensem. Et voluit quod nunquam posset legere Astrologiam bononiae vel alibi, publice vel private. Item privavit eum omni magisterio et onore cujuslibet doctoratus usque ad suae arbitrium voluntatis. Et condemnavit eum in lxx libris bononiensibus, quas inde ad pascha resurrectionis domini proximi solveret sub poena dupli."

We now lose sight of Cecco d'Ascoli for three years, when he again appears, this time in Florence. Charles, Duke of Calabria, eldest son of King Robert of Naples, entered Florence on the 30th of July, 1326, and in his retinue, in the following year, we find Cecco d'Ascoli holding the office of Physician and Astrologer, doubtless called to this 'high but perilous office' by the renown he enjoyed in that city. But neither his high office, nor popular favor were able to protect him against the persecutions of his enemies. The bishop of Aversa, who held the office of Chancellor at the court of Charles, now became one of their number, instigated by Dino del Garbo. The belief that Cecco was a magician, which had become quite prevalent, and which Villani seems to have shared, doubtless hastened his downfall. The latter says: "I

cancelliere del Duca, ch'era frate minore vescovo d'Aversa, parendogli abominevole a tenerlo il Duca in sua corte, il fece prendere."<sup>2</sup> Of Dino del Garbo's part in the matter, Villani says:

"Questo maestro Dino, fue gran cagione della morte del sopradetto Cecco, riprovando per falso il detto suo libro, il quale letto in Bologna avea. E molti dicono che il fece per invidia."<sup>3</sup>

Cecco was brought before the inquisitor *frate* Accursio, in the church of the minor friars (Santa Croce) where cardinal Giovanni degli Orsini, the papal legate; the Conte da Gubbio, vicar general of the diocese of Florence; the familiars of the holy office, and many other ecclesiastics were assembled. He was condemned to be burnt at the stake, and with him his books, including the 'Acerba.' Not only were all his goods and possessions confiscated,

"but all those persons were excommunicated who possessed any books written by him, unless they brought them to the bishop of the diocese or to the inquisitor of the place, within one day after they had knowledge of the sentence; and likewise those who knowing that others possessed any such books, and did not denounce them, and likewise any person who shall read or shall make use of them in the schools, directly or indirectly, or who shall cite or defend either them or their condemned author."

Cecco made no retraction, and the horrible sentence was fulfilled. He walked with a firm step to the place of execution, outside the *porta alla Croce* where he was bound by a chain to the stake. He met his death with most intrepid courage and unswerving fortitude, on the same day that sentence had been passed upon him, September 16th, 1327.

Even during his life time Cecco d'Ascoli was famous as a sorcerer and magician, and this reputation, in the popular mind, quite eclipsed that of the poet and philosopher. "The very name of the victim immolated by the fearful tribunal, and the name of his native city, served to feed the malignant legend." The name Cecco was changed to *Cieco*, and Cecco d'Ascoli became *Cecco diascoli* or *discolo*, that is, *Cecco diavolo*.<sup>4</sup> That Cecco believed seriously in Astrology, and professed

it openly, cannot be doubted by anyone that has read his 'Acerba.' It is also certain that he shared the common prejudices concerning the mysterious power of divination of magicians and sorcerers, "who either by chance or by the aid of the powers of darkness, succeeded sometimes in foretelling the future and working wonders." But the science cultivated by Cecco d'Ascoli was quite different from magic. His doctrines, as Castelli says, may be restricted to a simple proposition:

"Magic is a thing impious and uncertain in its results: while, on the contrary, the science of the stars and the study of the phenomena of the sub-lunary world, can give to the scholar that power of prescience which raises man to the dignity of the higher intelligences."<sup>5</sup>

Cecco's belief in Alchemy is attested by two sonnets which have been attributed to him. In the chapter, however, entitled "Cecco d'Ascoli and his native city," another side of the man's nature is revealed to us. We find that the heart of the austere man, who devoted his life to the study of *i piu tormentosi problemi della vita*, was not unmoved by gentler emotions.

The lady whom Cecco loved was a native of Ascoli, as we may gather from his affectionate mention of that city when he was obliged to leave it:

"Io mi ricordo che già sospirai  
Sì nel partire da quel dolce loco  
Ch'io dir non so perchè il cor vi lassai."

Bk. iv., c. 3.

Francesco Novati<sup>6</sup> believes, from the following lines of a sonnet attributed to Cecco, that this lady was a nun.

"Ohimè! sì m'ha condotto il nero manto!  
Dolce è la morte po'ch'io moro amando  
La bella vista *coperta dal velo*  
Che per mia pena la produsse il cielo."

Castelli even goes so far as to say that a Sister Lucia Clarissa, of the convent of Santa Chiara "fosse la donna amata dallo sventurato poeta."

In the succeeding chapters Castelli minutely analyses the 'Acerba,' and discusses its metre and language; then follows a discussion of Cecco's Latin works, his relations with Cino da Pistoia, and one of the most important

<sup>2</sup> Cronaca, x, c. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, x., c. 42.

<sup>4</sup> P. 55.

<sup>5</sup> P. 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Giorn. storico della lett. ital.*, i., 1., p. 92.

of all entitled "Cecco d'Ascoli and Dante." Cecco d'Ascoli gives us many proofs of his relations with Dante, but the latter does not even give an indication of "having known, loved or hated the Ascolan." It is necessary, therefore, to examine the cause of Dante's silence. "This could not have been due to ignorance of what Cecco was thinking and doing," for the latter was a personage surrounded by the admiration of scholars, by the envy of colleagues and by the favor of the great. Dante could not despise a rival who stood far above the common herd. In answer, Castelli says:

"Io sono convinto che l'Alighieri forse pienamente consapevole della superba impresa che Cecco d'Ascoli aveva ideata e veniva faticosamente compiendo; sono convinto, che, pure ammirando in cuor suo la generosità del titanico tentativo, deplorava quello sciupio di forze in opera vana, perchè fatta in condizioni disperate. Per questo, anzichè impugnare le armi invincibili, che suole adoprare contro i maligni e i vigliacchi, egli si restringe all'ufficio di compiangere ed ammonire l'uomo, fuorviato dalla ebbrietà del sapere, che aveva accolto nel cuore la tentazione di donare al mondo un secondo poema."

To follow all the arguments in proof of this statement would lead us too far. A careful reading of the book before us, however, does not convince us that its writer has quite succeeded in freeing Cecco d'Ascoli of the "hereditary prejudice" that has beset him. It is doubtful whether Gaspary, had he lived to read this book, would have changed his opinion given above, in any essential feature. But Signor Castelli's book is a very important contribution to the history of Italian thought in the Middle Ages, and no one can read it without profit. The author is deeply imbued with the spirit of his subject, his fairness is everywhere evident, and he writes in a style that is delightfully clear and attractive. In conclusion, after expressing the opinion that only after the entire text of the 'Acerba' has been critically re-established and the scattered fragments of Cecco d'Ascoli's scientific and literary works have been gathered together, can a true judgment of him be formed, the author says:

"Then will the figure of Cecco, purified and redeemed, rise forth, entire and majestic, like

the shade of Farinata from his fiery tomb; then will he rise from the blow that envy has dealt him to admonish us, that if it be the highest glory to die for one's fatherland, to die for science typifies the liberation and the glory of mankind."

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### ENGLISH VERSIFICATION.

*English Versification* for the Use of Students.

By Rev. JAMES C. PARSONS. Boston and New York: Leach, Shewell, and Sarborn, Copyright, 1891, xiii, 162 pp.

THE teachers of English literature in High Schools and Colleges have long been waiting for this little book,—though I am decidedly late in saying so.

The treatment is frankly dogmatic. Most instructors do not have the time necessary to consider the subject inductively and historically, and the scholars already have some conception of the nature of English verse.

Professor J. Schipper in *Englische Studien* (xviii, 147-150) has given to this book an abundance of blame, interspersed with a sparing amount of faint praise. In spite of all flaws, however, I believe that the little work deserves hearty commendation. The treatment of the subject seems to be, for the most part, clear, concise, and adequate. I have not subjected the book to that "trial by fire," the test of the class-room, but I judge the language to be level to the comprehension of the ordinary Freshman.

Schipper finds the book wanting in a logical arrangement of the material. Though Part i. is entitled "Principles," and Part ii, "Forms," some of the common *forms* of the line and stanza are discussed in Part i. From a purely practical point of view, however, the order of treatment does not seem to be a bad one. Chapter v has a somewhat blind title, "Variety in Metre." The subject treated is *The Stanza*.

The following passage in Mr. Parsons's preface does him injustice:

"The controversy of scholars as to the degree in which *quantity* prevails as a basis for English rhythm has been studiously avoided. It seems sufficient to follow the prevalent